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M.M. Vardy

Liquidating an Enemy

Sol, the truck-driver of the organization, first consulted their roommate Bernie, the tailor. Bernie in turn informed Nick, who also resided in the same room. Even though the youngest of the three, Nick was considered the relatively educated in the group, so his opinion counted in spite of his tender age of seventeen years. Nick had been working in a junior clerical capacity for the outfit, and possessed a certain amount command of English. Knowing English in these time and place gave a person important accesses to the military authorities, and raised him a cut above the average of other poor displaced persons. If the Russian D.P.s wanted to flatter him, they would call him with hyperbole "buchhalter", Russian-German for bookkeeper. Nick was a bespectacled, short youth of about 17, still confused about the direction of his life. Bernie was a tall, burly young man of around 24, of somewhat crude and uncouth manners. Mostly he was a good camerade and friend, but when provoked, one had better watch oneself. And many things provoked Bernie, whose favorite way of settling disputes was beating up the culprit,

Sol, was the senior member in the group, and also the richest, the master of the outfit's much coveted truck, and an expert car mechanic.

In these times, when there were practically no motor vehicles in private hands, having a truck at your disposal even for a few hours of the week, made you a potentially rich and powerful person.

He was a simple person from a poor region of the Carpat mountains between Hungary , Slovakia and Poland, who had, like most of the people in the community, lost every person in his family in the Nazi gas chambers. His

Not the truck-driver of the organization, that considered their roommate Bertie the tailor. Bertie in turn informed Nick, who also resided in the same room. Even though the youngest of the three, Nick was considered the relatively educated in the group, so his opinion counted in spite of his tender age of seventeen years. Nick had been working in a junior clerical capacity for the outfit, and possessed a certain amount command of English. Knowing English in these times and place gave a person important access to the military authorities, and raised him a cut above the average of other poor displaced persons. If the Russian D's wanted to thank him they would call him a "hypocrite" "imbecile", "Kassim-German for bookkeeper". Nick was a bearded, short youth of about 17, still confused about the direction of his life. He was a tall, pretty young man of around 24, of somewhat crude and uncouth manners. Mostly he was a good natured and friendly, but when provoked, one had better watch oneself. And many things provoked Bertie, whose favorite way of settling disputes was beating up the culprit.

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He was a simple person from a poor region of the Gypsy mountains between Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, who had, like most of the people in the community, lost every person in his family in the Nazi gas chambers. His

status in their room was based in part on the occasional special contributions he made to their snack supplies; peanut-butter, jam and an occasional loaf of bread.

Their recent liberation from the Nazis had restored them to physical freedom, and for a change, they had enough to eat. This was a rare privilege in war ravaged postwar Europe. They attained this plush life since they began working for the UNNRA outfit in the American Zone of Austria, and were even well clad in their American Army uniforms. These uniforms were considered the epitome of elegance at that time, and even bestowed on their wearers the aura of power and privilege of the richest occupying power, unreal as it may have been for this group.

"I think we have a Hungarian Nazi in our hands!" Shouted Bernie triumphantly to Nick, bursting in to their room.

Bernie was a graduate of the Hungarian led Jewish slave-labor battalions on the Russian front, where the name of the game was to eventually get rid of the Jews altogether, either by using them as live minedetectors, or by the slower method of torturing them to death.

By sheer luck and coincidence Bernie escaped, when the Hungarian command, trying to get rid of a typhoid epidemic put to the torch a local sick bay with several hundred sick Jewish slave-laborers in it.

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Bernie was a graduate of the Hungarian-led Jewish slave-labor battalion on the Russian front, where the name of the game was to eventually get rid of the Jews altogether, either by using them as live mine detectors, or by the slow method of turning them to death.

By sheer luck and coincidence Bernie escaped when the Hungarian command began to get rid of a Jewish prisoner but to the touch a local sick bay with several hundred sick Jewish slave-laborers in it.

- "What d'you think, Nick? What would be the best way to finish off the mother fucker?"

- "How in hell did you get hold of him?" asked Nick, his blood pressure raised by the possibility.

- "Actually, it was Sol who got him. The guy offered him five grands in greenbacks, if he would take him during one of his service trips over the Brenner Pass, to Italy".

The sum mentioned was at that period of time about a year's wages in the U.S., and a king's ransom in postwar Europe. It certainly raised the stakes for this broke outfit.

- "What kind of person would've the ground as hot under him during these days?" Pleaded Bernie his case against an imaginary opponent, while Nick still kept his peace, trying to figure out for himself the implications of the case. "Only about a half a year ago I'd say, it'd be a clear case: A fellow kike trying to get away from the Nazis. But now, it's just the opposite!" Continued Bernie the argument. The smug grin on his lips suggested, that he was savoring this newly changed state of affairs.

- "And how many crimes he must have committed, how many of us he must have killed, that he would cough up that kind of a dow to get over the Brenner illegally?!" Waxed Bernie eloquent, rounding out the logic of his evidence in the case. His voice finally trailed off, as if the longish chain of thought had exhausted him, having had his reasoning capacity tested to its limits. The discussion now turned to Bernie's initial question, about the 'how', not the 'if'.

A consensus eventually emerged to push the passenger from the truck onto one of the abysses bordering the narrow roads in a hairpin turn of the Alpine scene.

"What do you think, Nick? What would be the best way to finish off the
murder suspect?"

"How is that for bold of him?" asked Nick, his blood pressure raised
by the possibility.

"Actually, it was Sol who got him. The guy offered him five pounds in
advance, if he would take him during one of his regular trips over the
border back to Italy."

The man mentioned was at that period of time about a year's wage in the
U.S., and a fairly common in postwar Europe. It certainly raised the stakes in
this border affair.

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"And how many crimes he must have committed, how many of us he must
have killed, that he would cough up that kind of a deal to get over the border
illegally?" asked Boris again, rounding out the logic of his evidence in
the case. His voice finally faded off as if the logical chain of thought had
exhausted him, having led his reasoning capacity tested to its limits. The
discussion now turned to Boris's initial question, about the boat, not the if.

A compass, eventually emerged to reach the passenger from the back onto
one of the cots bordering the narrow cabin in a humpback form of the Alpine
scene.

Surprisingly, however even the initially bloodthirsty Bernie shied away from direct killing, thus dirtying his hands. Sol had joined the discussion before long, in his usual monosyllabic style.

His opinion was after all the decisive one, since he was the master of the truck. He also had an army issue revolver, which was essential for their undertaking. They intended to use it only in the extreme case of violent resistance. They hoped to avoid its use as much as possible, both because of its noise and because of its potentially incriminating traces. On the other hand, staging an accident of falling off into an Alpine chasm seemed the most plausible, least suspicious looking scenario.

- "What if he is really a refugee Jew, and not a Nazi, as he claims to be?"

Finally objected Nick, as if deliberately throwing in a monkey wrench to ruin the nicely worked out plan.

After much debate they ultimately accepted his suggestion bringing in the affair Nick's acquaintance, the commander of local Army Intelligence, Captain Levy, even though initially they had been quite reluctant to let such petty quibble slow them down.

Levy should examine the guy's identity to determine whether he was a refugee or a Nazi. If the examination should confirm their suspicion, it would still be possible to carry out their original plan - except that this time the culprit might be more suspicious.

During the examination Nick was present as a Hungarian interpreter. He talked the passenger into visiting Levy without applying major force, promising the man Levy's help in getting him to the other side of the border legally. The result of the examination of the man turned out to be equivocal. As a proof of his identity, the presumptive Nazi could recite orally, in broken Hebrew, the basic Jewish prayer, the 'Shema', but could not read the letters

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During the examination Nick was present as a Hungarian interpreter. He talked the passenger into visiting Levy without notifying anyone there, promising the man Levy's help in getting him to the other side of the border legally. The result of the examination of the man turned out to be apocryphal. As a proof of his identity, the passport he had could not be broken. However, the basic Jewish prayer, the "Shema", had could not read the letters

from the prayer book presented by Captain Levy. The frightened man had also got entangled in some inconsistencies when closely questioned about his identity. This left open the possibility of him being either an assimilated Hungarian Jew, who had forgotten the religious instruction of his youth, or a fugitive Nazi, who managed to memorize a Jewish prayer in order to pass as a Jew. Levy, applying the legal principle of "in case of doubt, it is for the defendant", or "innocent until proven guilty" let the man go 'on his own recognizance'. The man, indeed, speedily disappeared, before anyone could change his mind.

From this incident on Nick could not get rid of the taint on his name in the eyes of his roommates as a softy and a bit of a spoilsport.

